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ABSTRACT

A full-scale case study of a college freshman writing course was conducted that made inferences about the course, its direction, and design and described its apparent influence on the students. The study, which is described in this report, addressed: (1) instructional influences, (2) student performances, (3) instructors' and students' perceptions of the course, and (4) a synthesis of students' course expectations and final written products. Because no comprehensive case studies of writing courses existed from which to pattern the study, the models developed to guide both the selection and the analysis of materials are described in some length in the first portion of the document. The second part summarizes the purpose of the study, the kinds of data collected, and the procedures for analyzing the material. The third part is a synopsis of the case study of one of the eight students whose complete portfolios of course writings were analyzed. The fourth part presents a condensed version of the observations from the portfolio analysis, while the fifth part discusses the implications of these observations for the teaching of writing and for further research. (HTH)

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CASE STUDY, COURSE STUDY:
A CONTEXTUALIZED INVESTIGATION OF A WRITING COURSE

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Most studies of writing courses focus their research on material from the edges of a course (i.e., pre- and post-tests) instead of material from within the course. Numerous examples of such peripherally-oriented course studies can be found in Research on Written Composition by Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer, and in subsequent bibliographies and reviews of research (e.g., studies such as the following: Becker, 1958; Buxton, 1958; Clifford, 1981; Cummings, 1981; Davis, 1979; Faigley, 1979; Gottschalk, 1981; Harris, 1962).

While the number of such "peripheral" studies is legion, the number of studies which attend to actual course writings and other course materials is few. Very few have followed a student's writings throughout a course, for example, or examined the development and relationships among assignments, writings, and instructor's responses across the span of the course itself. Very few course studies have based their analysis and evaluation on material from the course, or on the actual working out of this material over time--on the process of the course, as it were. In effect, while the case study method has enjoyed increased status and increased use in other areas of composition research, it has only rarely been the basis for studies of writing courses themselves. When Emig wrote The Composing Processes of 12th Graders, she was able to cite only two published works which even began to approximate such a course study, as they examined students' writing within the context of a course, and at various points during the course (Holbrook, 1963; Kohl, 1967). Since the publication of Emig's report, only a handful of course studies and reports using the case study method have been added to this number, and in most instances the course study is an abbreviated one, focusing on only a portion of the course, for example, or based on only a few selected student writings from it (Coles, 1978; Herrmann and Tabor, 1974; Perrin, 1973).

The study reported below, on the other hand, was a full-scale case study of a freshman writing course (Jones, 1982), a study which used many of the retrievable documents from the course to reconstruct it, to make inferences about its direction and design, and to describe its apparent influences on the students. The study of these documents was highly contextualized. That is, each was examined in relationship to many others. Because no comprehensive case studies of writing courses existed on which to pattern this study, models had to be developed to guide both the selection and analysis of materials. Since these models are available only in Jones (1982), the first part of the following report presents them at some length. The second part summarizes the purpose of the study, the

kinds of data collected, and the procedures for analyzing the material. The third part is a synopsis of the study of Eileen, one of the eight students whose complete portfolio of course writings was analyzed. The fourth part presents a condensed version of the observations from the portfolio analysis, and the fifth part discusses the implications of these for the teaching of writing and for further research.

MODELS FOR RESEARCH ON WRITING COURSES

Drawing on the discourse model from communications theory, Klaus (1979) has proposed a model for conceptualizing and analyzing writing courses. In transferring the discourse model to the domain of a writing course, Klaus transforms the four elements (sender, receiver, message, signal) into (1) the teacher, (2) the students, (3) the "academic" reality (i.e., the subject matter or content of the course), and (4) language, the signal through which all the interactions among students, teacher, and subject matter are mediated. (See Figure 1)

According to Klaus, this model suggests three dominant relationships within a writing course, each formed and known through language, each indicated in the model by one of three intersecting lines. The first is the relationship between the teacher and the subject matter (line A). Theoretically, this extends to the limits of a teacher's understanding of the subject. Within a given course, though, it is restricted to the materials the teacher chooses as a means of presenting and engaging some aspect(s) of the field. These include such things as the texts of the course, films, lectures, and all the reading and writing assignments. These materials together reflect the teacher's conscious or unconscious decisions about the purposes and emphases of the course.

A second principal relationship within any course is that between the students and the subject matter (line B), and this relationship includes all the written and oral responses of a student to the texts of the course and to the assignments (i.e., course papers, examinations, oral presentations). These together express the students' involvement in and understanding of the course material, as well as indicate the writing abilities the students are developing or already possess.

The third line in the diagram (line C) represents the interactional relationships among individuals in a course. These can be sub-divided into three basic types: those which include the teacher and a group of students (i.e., class duscussions), those which include the teacher and a single student (i.e., oral and written responses to one another's work, such as a teacher's comments on a student's writing, or a student's comments on the nature of an assignment), and those which involve the students responding to one another (i.e., small group discussions, individual commentary on one another's writing). The number and

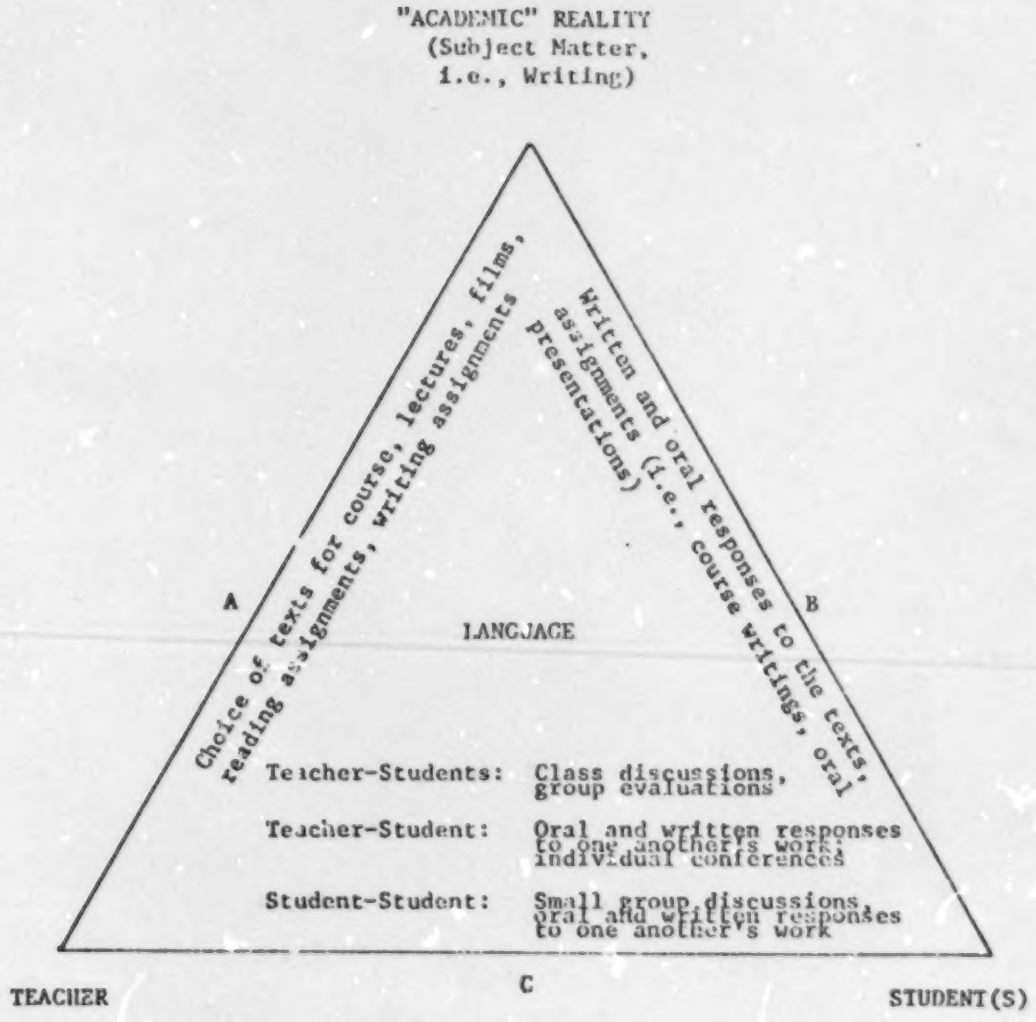
"ACADEMIC" REALITY
(Subject Matter,
i.e., Writing)
Choice of texts for course, lectures, films, reading assignments, writing assignments
Written and oral responses to the texts, assignments (i.e., course writings, oral presentations)
A
B
LANGUAGE
Teacher-Students: Class discussions, group evaluations
Teacher-Student: Oral and written responses to one another's work; individual conferences
Student-Student: Small group discussions, oral and written responses to one another's work
TEACHER
C
STUDENT(S)

Figure 1. Static model of a writing course.

quality of these relationships in any course signal the degree to which the course is taking advantage of possibilities for peer evaluation and response, as well as indicating whether the nature of the teacher's responses consists of grading, comments--and to what extent--or both.

The relationships represented by the three lines, while discrete in theory, intersect with one another and create a web of interactions. For example, in courses where student writing as well as published prose is at the center of class activity, what a student writes for one assignment may become the focus for the next discussion in class. It may become, that is to say, the text. Should the teacher want the class to discuss the nature and value of responding, she may use for discussion a commentary that someone has written about a student paper. There, an interaction among students becomes the text. In other words, the materials and activities of the course, graphically occuping the center of the triangle, do not remain isolated from one another. Rather, in the actual workings of a course the various components which make up a course interact with and modify one another.

To understand the directions of possible influence among these components, it is necessary to create from the "static model" a "dynamic" one, which will represent at least a portion of a course through time. Omitting oral activities for the moment, and restricting the model to variables that involve writing would result in a scheme something like that shown in figure 2.

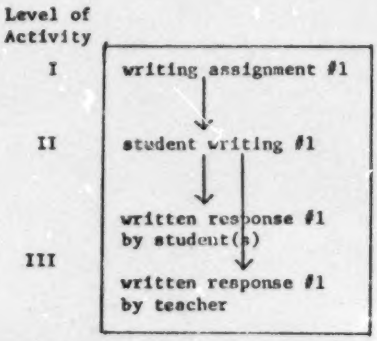

Figure 2. Dynamic model of a writing course: basic vertical unit.

This three-tiered unit represents all the writing components of a course, with each level of activity drawn from one "side" of the static model. These components include the writing assignment (from line A, reflecting the relationship between the teacher and the subject matter), the student writing (from line B, reflecting the relationship between the student and the subject matter), and the written responses to that writing, by the teacher and perhaps other students (from line C, reflecting the interactional relationships among individuals in a course). Among

the levels of activity in this three-tiered unit, the relationships are essentially ones of stimulus and response: a writing assignment provides an occasion for student writing, and the student writing in turn provides the occasion for response to that writing by the teacher and other students. This unit represents in its inter-connections all components of the course (students, teacher, language, and subject matter), with the student's writing in this case at the center.

Of course, this single vertical unit represents only the writing associated with a single assignment. Representing the writings associated with two assignments requires two units. Representing the writings associated with three assignments requires three units, and so forth, out to the total number of assignments contained within the course. Thus the representation of vertical relationships among the writing components within an entire course looks something like figure 3.

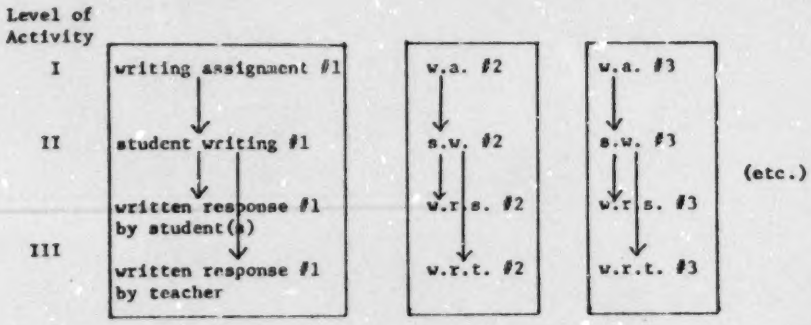

Figure 3. Dynamic model of a writing course: series of vertical units.

A writing course, then, can be graphically represented as a series of three-tiered vertical units, with each unit containing a writing assignment, a student writing, and the written responses to that writing. But vertical relationships are not the only ones operating within a course. Horizontal ones are also present. That is to say, connections also exist between and among units at the same level. Consider, for example, level I--writing assignments. All assignments may be connected, with one developing into the next, with each assignment perhaps offering some variation on a previous one. Likewise with level II--student writing. There may be development of an idea, or of an ability, between one writing and the next, or between a piece written one week and a piece written four weeks later. So too with level III--written responses. An idea or subject in one response may appear in a subsequent one, with the responses a collection of emphases, with now one thing in focus, now another. In their most basic form, these relationships can be represented as horizontal categories, running throughout the course on each of the three levels (figure 4).

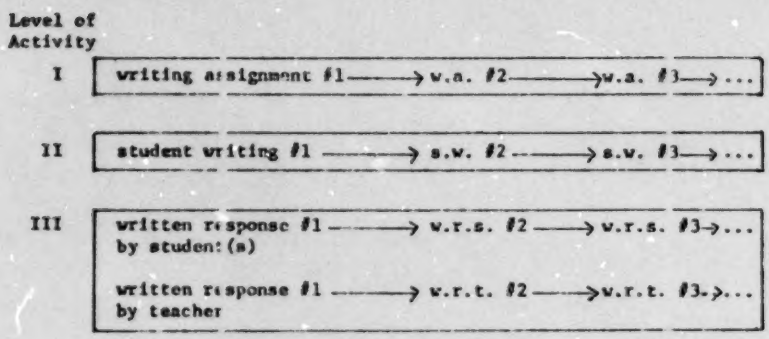
Level of Activity
I
writing assignment #1 → w.a. #2 → w.a. #3 → ...
II
student writing #1 → s.w. #2 → s.w. #3 → ...
III
written response #1 by student(s) → w.r.s. #2 → w.r.s. #3 → ...
written response #1 by teacher → w.r.t. #2 → w.r.t. #3 → ...

Figure 4. Dynamic model of a writing course: series of horizontal units.

Theoretically, connections within a horizontal category from the diagram (e.g., between one assignment and the next, or between one student writing and the next) can be non-existent, constant, or intermittent. If connections are non-existent it is impossible to find patterns or development present within the category over time. If assignments are unrelated, for example, each is a discrete and separate task, complete unto itself, assignable at any point during the course independent of other assignments. Similarly, if individual pieces of student writing are unrelated, they reflect the same strengths and weaknesses throughout the course, show no sign of development, and reveal no noticeable experimentation. If the connections are non-existent, in other words, patterns are not expected nor are they found.

However, if the connections within a horizontal category are constant, that is, if the course is built upon development and continuities, it is possible to recognize changes between and among the components of any horizontal set. In the case of writing assignments each assignment is seen to have connection with others, connections based on any number of possible relationships (e.g., variations on a theme, variations on perspective, movement through the abstraction ladder). Likewise in the case of student writing the changes and development may be seen in any number of ways: increases in syntactic fluency, syntactic versatility, rhetorical flexibility; increase in mastery of conventions of edited American English, to name but a few.

Between these extremes--on the one hand no connections, on the other hand constant connections--lies a middle ground where connections are sometimes apparent and sometimes not apparent. These breaks in continuity may reflect portions of a course where things "fall apart," or where nothing seems to be happening, or indeed where much is happening that has simply not yet reached the surface of the prose.

As the previous discussion suggests, the connections across time within one category often influence the connections and relationships on the other two levels. The relationships among assignments influence the relationships among student

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writing (i.e., tasks designed to help students develop flexibility in a variety of sentence types may indeed help students develop the use of a variety of sentence types in their prose), and those in turn influence the patterns among responses. The horizontal and vertical dimensions operate simultaneously, in other words, much as figure 5 represents.

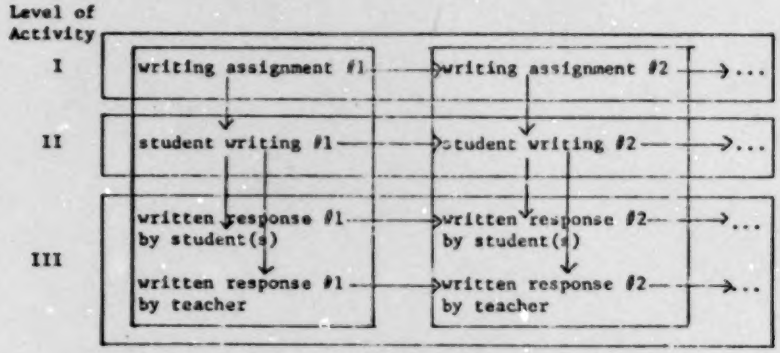

Figure 5. Dynamic model of a writing course: combined series of vertical and horizontal units.

Even with this blending in figure 5 of two dimensions, not all relationships among the writing components of a course are addressed. In addition to the horizontal and vertical units, there are also diagonal ones. The influences work up through the diagram as well as from the top down, in much the manner as represented in figure 6.

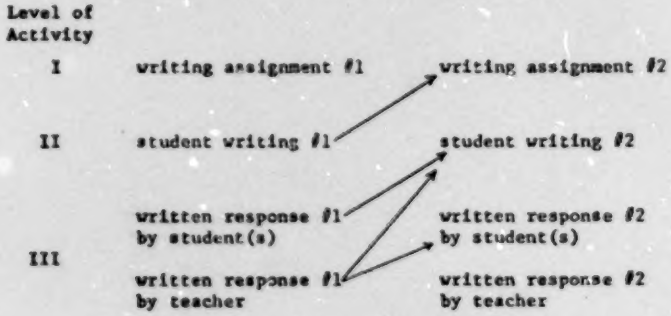

Figure 6. Dynamic model of a writing course: diagonal units, set one.

Within the third level--the area of response--for example, the particular forms and emphasis which characterize a teacher's response to student writing may serve as a model for the student's later commentaries on one another's work. Additionally, the responses to one piece of student writing may change the nature of that student's subsequent writing (provided the student is listening to advice and suggestions). Likewise, student writing elicited by one assignment may influence subsequent assignments, particularly if the teacher is alert for evidence that a task has been

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too difficult and needs reinforcement, or unclear and needs clarification, or that the concerns and abilities of the class in general suggest the need for alterations in already-planned assignments.

If these influences on the one diagonal are combined with the lines of influence from the vertical and horizontal dimensions, the following possible web of connections emerges (figure 7):

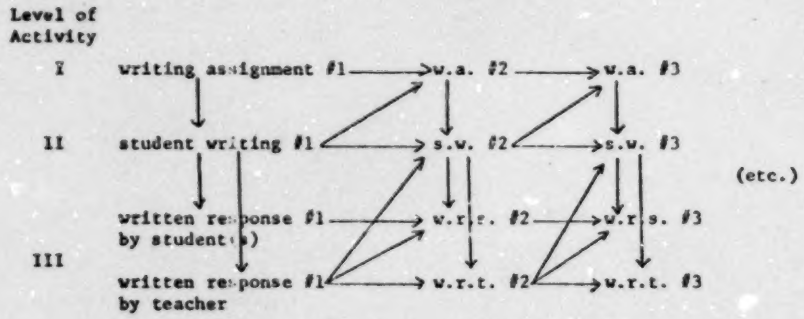

Figure 7. Dynamic model of a writing course: combined series of vertical and horizontal units, with diagonal units, set one.

The model can be spun out to its logical extensions by noting the influences which exist on the other diagonal. This is the area of delayed or postponed reaction. Sometimes students do not "pick up" on the implications of an assignment until later in the course, do not understand the demands of a task nor know how to modify their writing to meet those demands until that particular assignment is behind them. In such a case, if they belatedly show evidence of being able to adapt their prose appropriately when the task faces them again, the earlier assignment is influencing them "after the fact" as it were. Similarly, a teacher may refrain from responding to certain characteristics/qualities of a student's writing until a time when it seems more appropriate to address them. The particular qualities are not overlooked, that is to say, but withheld for direct attention until later. These delayed influences, combined with the previously-discussed relationships, produces the abundant network of connections in figure 8.

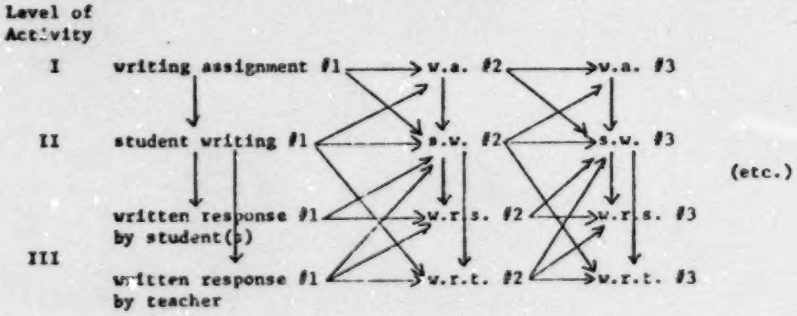

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Figure 8. Dynamic model of a writing course: combined series of vertical, horizontal, and all diagonal units.

Yet even with all this complexity, the course is not completely represented, for the oral dimension of the course remains to complicate the picture further: lectures and other individual presentations, class discussions, small group workshops, individual conferences. These additional elements, together and separately, affect the activities in writing. Conversely, writing assignments, student writings, and written responses easily provide the substance and occasion for confererces, workshops, and large group discussions. Conceivably, then, all the activities and materials of a course--and the people behind them--may be working together to in-form one another.

The two basic models presented above--the static model and the dynamic model--taken together, suggest a range of possibilities for studying the components of a course, from the most narrow to the most spacious. The most narrow concentrates on only a single element, isolated from all the others, such as a single assignment, or a single student writing, or a single response. The most spacious involves attention to all possible relationships among all the elements, from both the oral and written dimensions, for every individual in the class. Even if the latter study were possible, its complexity would provide far more than the mind could make sense of. Such a study would result in so much information that it would be almost impossible to know how to make sense of it, to know what to see. At the other extreme, however, vision is not necessarily any clearer since anything studied in isolation is deprived of context, and the view of it is to that degree impoverished. The clearer visions obviously exists somewhere between these extremes.

The remaining options may be divided into three approaches. With the first, the study follows a single element throughout the course, or through a section of the course (as in following a single line on the horizontal axis of the dynamic model). This include such studies as the progress and relationship among groups of writing assignments, or among reading assignments, or among class discussions. It also includes longitudinal studies of a single student's writing, or of the writing of several students, throughout the course or through a portion of it.

The second approach to a course study involves observing relationships among some or all of the components as they interact at any given time (as in following a single line on the vertical axis of the dynamic model). For example, it is possible to study relationships among a single writing assignment and the writing and responses it elicits, from one student or a group of students, responses both written and oral, in class discussions, workshop sessions, and individual consultations.

Beyond these two basic options--studying a single element of the course through time, or studying several elements of the course as they interconnect at a given time--lies the third option, which combines the breadth of the first with the

depth of the second. In such a study, different layers of activity are considered in their relationships to one another across time. Reading assignments during a span of two weeks, for example, can be studied in relation to the class discussions which followed them, and to accompanying writing assignments, and to subsequent oral and written responses. As with the other two approaches, the third offers the possibility of including one student or several, or indeed extending the scope to include the entire class. It also offers the possibility of including as few as two layers of activity (i.e., writing assignments and student writings) and as many as the total number of layers operating in the course.

Each of these approaches proceeds from the assumption that any single element of the course needs illumination from another. With the first approach, illumination comes through the discovered sequential relationships within a single layer of the course through time. With the second, illumination comes through the sequential relationships among several layers of activity in the course at a particular time. With the third, illumination comes through the combined relationships established among activities across time. In every case, no component is considered to exist outside a network of relationships. Each component is seen and understood, that is to say, in terms of others.

Guided by the models above, the study reported in the following sections began with an examination of several "horizontal layers" of the course, moving from the sequence of course assignments, to the series of instructor's responses, to the series of class sessions, to the collected course writings of eight individual students. The study of each layer took into account the analysis of those layers which had come before, so that as the investigation progressed it became increasingly integrative and contextualized. What resulted was a case study of a writing course, a study concerned with the interpretation of events--specifically, written events--in context.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This essentially ethnographic study took as its province an entire writing course. In its broadest conception, the purpose of the study was to discover what the teacher and students together made (both in meaning and in tangible products) of the course. Such a global concern, of course, is not so easily addressed, and across the entire study it was approached in four interlocking sections, with purposes of their own:

Part I: Analysis of Instructional Influences

Purpose: to identify the goals implicit in the instructional materials, that is, within (a) the course assignments, (b) the instructor's written responses, and (c) the class sessions.

Part II: Analysis of Student Performances (Portfolios of Course Writings)

Purposes: to determine whether the goals implicit in the instructional materials were realized throughout the semester in the students' course writings;

to identify any personal idiosyncracies and purposes which emerged across the semester in the writings of individual students.

Part III: Analysis of Questionnaires Gauging the Instructor's and Students' Perceptions of Course

Purposes: to determine what emphases the instructor and students created/saw in the course;

to determine what improvements in writing and understanding students perceived for themselves as a result of the course.

Part IV: Synthesis

Purposes: to discover the consonance and dissonance between course expectations for the students' writing and the students' actual written performances;

to discover the consonance and dissonance between the implicit emphases of the course and the perceived emphases of the course.

The original study moved through all these parts and all the documents listed in the following section, but the center of the study, and by far the largest portion of the investigation, was within Part II. For that reason, as well as due to limitations of space, this paper will only report several aspects of that section of the study.

The analysis of Part II was specifically concerned with whether or not the students' writing showed evidence of the goals implicit in the instructional materials. The analysis of those materials in Part I revealed five principle course concerns: (a) the use of writing as an aid to thought and a source of invention; (b) the use of writing as a means of establishing dialogue through personal voice and appropriate adaptation of the subject for the audience; (c) clear focus in writing, and attention to purpose; (d) the use of detail and elaboration; and (e) attention to the conventions of the language and care in locating surface errors. The first aim of Part II, then, was to discover whether or not the students realized these particular course goals in their writing. The second aim was to discover what individual, even idiosyncratic characteristics and purposes emerged for each student in their prose.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

English 125: "The Writing Process"

The course studied was among those developed in the spring of 1979 at the Institute on Writing, a joint project of the University of Iowa and the National Endowment for the Humanities. This particular course was entitled "The Writing Process," and was designed by Trudy Dittmar, who first offered it at Brookdale Community College (Lincroft, New Jersey) during the fall of 1979, at which time all the materials for the study were collected. The course consisted of a sequence of 34 writing tasks arranged in 11 "assignment clusters," most having a strong expressive and exploratory orientation. The assignments were designed to build upon one another, to call for more demanding tasks as the course progressed, and to return occasionally to the subject or perspective of a previous writing to focus on a more complicated relationship or developmental task.[1]

Materials of the Study

The materials of the study consisted exclusively of the retrievable documents of the course, as provided by both the students and the teacher. These included the following:

1) the sequence of 34 course assignments, plus all work-sheets, hand-outs, and supplementary materials made available to the students;

2) complete portfolios of course writings from eight representative students in the course, including journal entries, lists of questions, exploratory writings, rough drafts, final papers and revisions;

3) from the portfolios, all written comments concerning the various writings, comments provided by the instructor and in some cases other students;

4) weekly course journal (kept by the instructor), containing a record of the activities and discussions of class sessions;

5) three-part questionnaire, completed by instructor and representative students at the end of the course. Questionnaire addressed perceived emphases of the course, perceived improvements in writing abilities as a result of the course, and perceived increase in understanding as a result of the course.

The eight students themselves were selected by the instructor, and were specifically chosen to represent the range of abilities in the class. (One of the eight received "highest honors" for the course, five received "honors," and two received "credit." For the 26 members of the class as a whole, the final grade distribution was as follows: "highest honors" - 2; "honors" - 13; "credit" - 9; "no credit" - 2.)

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[1] A typical cluster was the following. It was both generative and retrospective (5a provided material for both 5b and 5c; 5d asked for reflection on the process of creating the previous three). It moved from known to unknown audiences,

The materials of the study consisted, then, of most of the written documents of the course. These documents represented the three principal relationships which form the basis of any writing course (see figure 1 above): (1) the assignments (line A: subject matter--teacher); (2) the individual student's writings (line B: subject matter--student); and (3) written responses (line C: student[s]--teacher). These written materials spanned the three essential relationships of the course, and in being collected from all points during the semester, made possible a study of both its breadth and depth.

Analysis of Portfolios

The stance of the investigator in this study was similar to that of an historian, who reconstructs and experiences a system intuitively with the aid of artifacts--in this case, the remaining documents and records of a course. Given the nature of these particular documents, the approach also borrowed from the methods of literary criticism and rhetorical analysis in that recurring patterns were noted in single writings and throughout the complete corpus of writings, as were developing strategies, themes, and forms.

With the research discussed in the first part of this report as a guide, the analysis of material was conducted in several stages. First, the sequence of 34

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and from expressive towards persuasive tasks:

5a. Think of a machine you are familiar with. It can be any machine you use in your job, a hobby, or any aspect of your life. Just be sure that you choose a machine whose workings you are familiar with. Imagine you are that machine, going through its routine. Freewrite in your journal for 15 minutes on what it is like to be the machine you have chosen.

5b. Using the material you produced in your freewriting, and speaking in the role of the machine, write a piece for a child in which you aim to help the child understand what the machine is like and how it works. Try to both entertain and inform the child.

5c. Now return to being yourself. Examine the pleasures and pains of the machine's operation to try to come up with an idea for improving the machine or its use. Write a proposal to the company that produced the machine suggesting this idea.

5d. You have just written two very different pieces based on the same "raw material." Now I would like you to reflect upon this experience in your journal. Some of the following questions may stimulate reflection and help you examine the problems you met in the process of writing those two pieces. In your writing for 5b, how did you know where to begin? How did you decide what to include and what to leave out? How did you decide on an order in which to arrange your details? How did you transform the material of your writing 5b into the material for 5c? Why did you have to make that transformation? How did you decide on what to include and exclude? How did you go about ordering your information in this paper?

writing assignments was considered to determine what connections and continuities were at work among them, and what set of recurring motifs or emphases seemed to emerge. Next the teacher's written responses to the students were analyzed in a similar manner, as, in turn, was the record of class sessions. These three merging sets of emphases were combined into a single list of course expectations which then served in the analysis of the eight portfolios of student writing.

The analysis of a portfolio was therefore a culminating activity, undertaken after the instructional influences of the course had themselves been analyzed and discussed. The portfolio analysis was also a cummulative activity, in that it took up the five course goals for the student's writing individually, looking for evidence that each was (or was not) being realized, and picking up any emerging, individual patterns along the way. The procedure for testing whether a course expectation was being realized in the writing involved the following steps: (1) identifying the course goal, (2) locating the particular areas/assignments in the sequence which would most likely elicit material showing the expectations being realized, and (3) analyzing the writings elicited by these assignments to see if these expectations had indeed been met. While this basic approach remained constant throughout the analysis of portfolios, the particular direction of the analysis and the process of identifying emerging characteristics depended upon the writings themselves, as can be seen the following analysis of writings from one of the student's portfolios.

An Example of Portfolio Analysis: Eileen (a Portion of that Study)

One of the course expectations was that students would use writing as an aid to thought and a source of invention. The analysis of course assignments identified several groups of assignments which were most likely to elicit writing showing the development of ideas, or the discovery of new information. One of these groups consisted of the five assignments reproduced in Table 1. In the analysis of Eileen's portfolio, the writings elicited by this group of assignments are examined together, to determine if discoveries and development of thought have taken place for her.

As the first assignment invites, Eileen begins capturing the edges of an early memory in her writing for 1a, but one paragraph into the piece she is side-tracked from the action which she originally must have been intending to discuss:

Table 1

One Cluster of Course Assignments
Likely to Encourage Discoveries or
the Development of Ideas

Assignment Number	Text
1a	The topic for your first writing is your earliest memory--the first experience or fragment of experience you can remember. Describe it. Recreate it. What was the setting? Who was there? What was going on? What were you feeling? Put down in any order everything that comes to mind about this experience. (in-class writing/10 minutes)
1b	Write about the experience of writing assignment 1a. Here are some questions to guide you: What were your thoughts and feelings as I made the assignment? How were you reacting as I explained what you were about to do? as you began to write? Were there times during the 10-minute period when your mind went blank, or did material keep flowing? If there were blank moments, what did you do then? In writing the piece, did you discover anything you didn't know you knew? Does anything surprise you about what you've written? (in-class writing)
1c	Look back on the material you gathered in 1a and 1b. What do you make of it? What do the details and images you used tell you about the experience you were remembering? In other words, how might you use your raw material in answering this question: Of all the experiences you had in your early life, why do you think you still remember this one? Write again about your first memory and what you believe its significance is or might be interpreted to be. (out-of-class writing)
[eight weeks later]	
10b.	Reread paper 1c carefully. Then write in your journal for 10-15 minutes about how you see that paper now. Is there anything you'd like to change about the paper? What?
10c.	Revise paper 1c so as to improve it. The way you define <u>improve</u> here is up to you.

(1a) The first memory that I vividly remember was an afternoon on the front porch of the apartment house that I lived in as a little girl. The house was a large old house that once was part of an estate in Yonkers, N.Y. It sat on top of a hill facing the Hudson River. The house had three floors and 6 apartments with my families being on the top floor.

The afternoon that I remember was a warm spring day. My younger sister Joan and I had been brought downstairs and put on the front porch to get some fresh air while my mother cleaned. The front porch covered three fourth of the house it had two stairways with wooden pillars and fences. Actually it was an ideal place for children to play. I was about four years old and Joan about 1 year. My mother had placed Joan in a jumping chair and told me to watch her.[2]

With only ten minutes to write 1a in class, it is not surprising that Eileen was unable to finish sketching the outlines of the memory. What is surprising, though, is that she is so clearly caught up in the location of it, a point she recognizes and acknowledges in her commentary, written moments later:

(1b) I didn't seem to have any problem finding the experience to write about. I was a little apprehensive about my being able to start but it seem I work better under pressure. I also found that I tend to be descriptive. I didn't really finish telling about my experience but got caught up in the house itself. I never realized what a landmark in my life the house itself was. Did not experience any blank moments but had a hard time trying to stay on the track. I definitly could have kept on going. I find that I would really like to remember more about the house and that writting might be more enjoyable than I thought.

Having defined for herself the center of her interest, a focus she had not realized before beginning to write, Eileen approaches 1c with the house, and particularly its porch, as the subject, rather than with a particular event as one. This reorientation changes both the direction and the content of the writing, which was done outside of class and, coincidentally, on a porch:

(1c) While writting about my first memory I found myself becoming repeatedly sidetracked by the house in which the event took place. As I look back on it now I begin to realize how much of a mark the house itself left on me. The influence of the past has never been so apparent as it is right now.

My mind is still full of images from the essay this morning. I can still clearly see the porch on which the event took place. Funny, that my struggles with this essay should also take place on a porch. The present porch is attached to the home that I bought nine years ago. Looking back I now realize that the fact this house had such a large porch was definitly a deciding factor in my choice.

With that connection drawn between past and present, Eileen continues in 1c to pursue other points of comparison between that first house and the one where she currently lives, and to speculate on the reasons why there are so many similarities

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[2] Examples of Eileen's writing are reproduced unedited. Any underlinings have been added for emphasis.

between them:

> My curiosity highly aroused I sat and made a list of the features of the two houses. I was not really astonished when the list showed a number of simularities. Thinking about these facts further I find that my preferance has always run toward older houses with plenty of room and odd nooks and crannies. I can't really say why this house should stand out so vividly in my mind or why it should have had such a influence on my tastes. Perhaps the fact that the years spent there were the first ten of my life might have something to do with it. At that age my honizons were more confined so I guess I tended to stay closer to home. "Play in the yard," seems to be a sentence closely related to those years. I also had the task of watching two younger sisters. Whatever the reasons I can honestly say that I do not begrudge the influence that part of the past seems to have on my present.

Readers never learn what particular event marked the beginnings of Eileen's memory, but they do see through these first pieces that the house itself was exceedingly important to her--so much so that its characteristics were present in other houses where she lived. To go by what Eileen states, this was something which she had not realized before beginning the cluster of writings, and something which gave her pleasure and made her curious. It is apparent from her own words that Eileen discovered a correspondence between past and present which she had not been aware of before, as she followed a path she was interested in pursuing.

In her response to this series, Dittmar picked up on the comparison, yet pushed for more emphasis on the unspoken event behind the lines. The response is framed largely in questions, which have a related focus:

> It's interesting the direction your paper took--focussing on an investigation of the two porches in your life--on a comparison of them and how they have influenced and played roles in your life. But I have questions. Mainly. what was the event you rememberdd? Could you tell the event that influenced your feeling about porches? Did it influence you strongly enough over the years so that you ended up having to have a house with a porch? I like what's here, but I'd like to know more.

Dittmar seemed intent upon pressing Eileen into attaching her feelings to specific memories, perhaps so other people could more easily understand them, perhaps so Eileen could understand the source of pleasure and comfort herself. Whatever the purpose, Eileen picked up on the direction of Dittmar's remarks and, as she began rewriting this piece several months later, had the following comments to make in response:

(10b) I think I would still have trouble just sticking to the incident on the porch. My mind still wants to explain the reason for my fondness for porches. I will have to try and tie everything in together. Explain the hours that I spent on the porch. The childish delight I took in being outside in the rain without being really outside. The haven a porch can be from weather, coolness in the summer, warmth in the winter. Roller skating on the porch. 1st private wooden rink. The way its

boards would move under my feet. My sister's playpens were placed there. My trike was stored there. Use to play jacks and dolls. Splinters I have picked up from the wood. The railings I use to walk. The feeling of

Eileen's memories here leave off in mid-sentence, or perhaps she stopped because she could not at that point find words for whatever feeling she was experiencing. While acknowledging Dittmar's comments, she essentially refused to take her piece in the direction of the initial request--that is, with a focus on a single event. For Eileen, the source of her fondness for porches resides in a number of events and incidents, which she fleetingly touches upon in that paragraph above. Those lines, with their many snatches of memory, read much like a poem. They evoke a mood of busy delight, and security, strong in over-all effect, to which particular events are secondary. What continues to govern Eileen's thinking and writing here is not an event, that is to say, but a feeling attached to a particular place. In that respect, 10b can be read as Eileen's attempts to capture whatever specifics may have formed and driven the feelings connected with that place. She defines the problem in her own way, and sets out to find her own answers. What results when she tries to "tie everything in together" is the actual revision, writing 10c, which begins as follows:

(10c)Finding a place to concentrate is very hard in my home. In order to write this essay I had escaped to my front porch where I made a corner nest and skillfully camouflaged it with bikes. Hidden from the world, I then proceded to shake my brain for an early childhood memory.

Isn't it funny the way that the past and the present sometimes come together when you least expect them to. There I was sitting in a corner of a large wooden porch hiding from the world just as I did as a child. Early memory did you say? My earliest memories are full of porches! The house I spent my first twelve years in was surrounded by a porch. I have never seen one quite like it since.

We know from the sequence of writings in cluster 1 that Eileen remembered the porch from her childhood before connecting it to the porch on her current home. In this revision, however, the order of recognition is reversed. Eileen reframes the occasion for her writing so that her current front porch evokes the memory of the one she knew as a child. The alteration is significant for a number of reasons. First, it gives paramount importance to the connection between present and past, placing the emphasis not so much upon a particular memory as upon the correspondence between current and remembered experiences. Second, it demonstrates that Eileen recognized that a reordering of events would create a pleasing frame, or jumping-off point for the essay. She could begin, in other words, with her actual location in the world and connect it to a remembered location within her mind. Within this construction, the location of the writing suggests the subject for the writing. The third reason this revision is significant is because it demonstrates that Eileen had recognized

her right to reconstruct events in this way. She was not bound to her initial interpretation nor sequence. She had discovered the license she had as writer to reshape the events as she wished, for whatever end she--or the subject matter--happened to choose. If in 1a through 1c she discovers the correspondence between past and present through the agency of the porch, in 10c she decides to present that correspondence to us as a fact. That is the point of origin here, not as in 1c the point she finally reaches.

Eileen concludes writing 10c as follows:

> The house was an old victorian residing on top of a hill and surrounded by half an acre of majestically terraced land. My sisters and I were the only children and as such really took advantage of the many places to play offered by the house and grounds. Our favorite was the front porch. Made of wooden slates with carved posts and railings its possibilities were endless.
>
> We learned to rollerskate by holding on to the railing and then making obsticle courses as our skills progressed. We rode our trikes and wheeled our dolls; played house and camped out. When no one was looking we would try to walk the railing from post to post, having contests to see who could go the farthest before losing balance. No matter what the weather there was always a place to play, the porch was a shelter from elements and enemies alike. No need to worry about strangers you never met them on the porch, couldn't catch cold; your feet didn't get wet. It was a haven for harassed children, a babysitter for harried parents, and a place for friends to meet.
>
> Thinking about it now I would have to admit that the presence of a porch did influence my decision when it came to buying my home. Although I don't rollerskate on this one, my children do, have used it to shelter playpens and to confine toddlers. From Spring to Fall it becomes a showcase for my plants. It is still a place to watch rain and snow from and every Thursday night I sit on my front porch steps drinking tea and listening to organ music coming from the church around the corner. How fortunate I am to have a front row seat for concerts as well as life.

For Eileen it is not only the actual continuing presence of a porch in her life which is at issue, but also the continuing actions and life <u>around</u> the porch which are important. In the fourth paragraph of the writing we learn of her childhood connections with a porch. In the fifth paragraph we learn of her adult connections. In the fourth paragraph it is she who is learning to rollerskate, holding on to the porch railing. In the fifth paragraph it is her children who are learning how, in the same manner. In the fourth paragraph, it is she who is placed on the porch by harried parents. In the next, she is confining her own toddlers there. It was then "a shelter from elements"; it is still "a place to watch rain and snow from." The essay not only celebrates porches, it also celebrates the continuities of life. And it celebrates Eileen's wish to keep the correspondences working. In the revision, Eileen admits in as many words,

she wanted to give her children some of the pleasures of her own childhood. Providing them with a porch would help insure that: "Thinking about it now I would have to admit that the present of a porch did influence my decision when it came to buying my home. Although I don't rollerskate on this one, my children do...."

This series of writings shows Eileen at work making discoveries about her own life and her own writing. She finds an aspect of a first memory which intrigues her, decides to pursue it, and discovers the meaning it holds in her life. Along the way she also discovers that she has license to take her writing in the direction she chooses rather than in the direction which her teacher suggests. And she discovers that she has license to revise her insights and memories to fit a reconceived purpose. This is surely an instance of growth and development through writing. It is also an instance of a writer discovering her subject and its meaning on her own.

The preceding analysis recognizes that within a writing course both the instructor and the students have their own plans and purposes--sometimes distinct, sometimes merging. On the one hand, the design of assignments and responses by the instructor set up certain expectations for the students' prose. On the other hand, the students may have their own agendas and individual patterns of response and development, sometimes quite different from those imagined for them by a teacher. In the case of Eileen, this portion of her portfolio shows that one of the instructor's course goals was being realized in Eileen's writing. It also shows some of Eileen's "self-generated" tendencies--specifically her curiosity, independence, and interest in seeking out correspondences. While course expectations can by hypothesized before turning to the student's portfolio, the individual characteristics of a student's prose obviously cannot. These emerge during the actual analysis, in the process of paying attention to stylistic and rhetorical patterns, strategies, and characteristics. Once such a characteristic is noted, either in a single writing or within a group of writings, it contributes to the hypothesis which informs subsequent readings. The fact that in these pieces Eileen was inclined to seek connections, for example, suggested that such might be a distinguishing characteristic of her prose elsewhere in the course (as indeed turned out to be the case). The analysis of subsequent readings thus became informed by that contextualizing information.

This example of analysis from one portion of one portfolio demonstrates the salient characteristics of the analysis of all of them. First, attention is given to whole pieces. Second, readings are cummulative. The analysis of one piece contributes to the analysis of the next, and the two together contribute

to the next, and so forth, resulting in an increasingly rich and contextualized reading and study. Third, the analysis alternates between hypothesis testing and hypothesis generating. That is, the patterns and structure of course assignments and responses create a set of expectations (hypotheses) about what will emerge in the student's writing. The reading of a portfolio "tests" whether such expectations are met. As the analysis of the portfolio progresses, hints of individual patterns or qualities emerge in the writings, independent of the instructor's course design. Once noted, these create expectations of their own, as the reader asks if these are anomolous and idiosyncratic, or part of a larger pattern (hypothesis generating). Subsequent readings are thus informed by these additional expectations, which themselves become tested for accuracy and refinement.

OBSERVATIONS

The analysis of each portfolio ended with a set of summarizing observations, bringing together the main points of discovery and discussion in the analysis as a whole. These observations about individual portfolios are most meaningful within the context of the actual writings. Because only Eileen's writings--though only a few of them--have been reproduced here, only the summarizing observations about her portfolio are presented below. This is followed by a set of observations concerning the eight portfolios together.

About Eileen's Portfolio

The analysis and interpretation of Eileen's entire portfolio of writings revealed that the expectations of the course (see page 11 above) were consistently realized by her. She used the writings as a source of invention throughout the semester, that is, as a means of finding material for later pieces, a means of discovering how she felt about various aspects of her world, a means of discovering what she cared for and what she wanted to know more about, even to the point of disregarding directions suggested by her instructor in favor of those she found more fascinating. Eileen also used her writings as a means of discovering and seeking out correspondences--between her past and her present, between herself and objects around her, between what she wanted and what she had. This spirit of inquiry, and this enthusiasm for establishing connections, became an increasingly obvious characteristic of Eileen's voice throughout the portfolio--a characteristic, perhaps too, of her world view. This concern with connections extended over into her relationship with her audience, and showed itself in the care she took with presenting material so readers could enter into and understand what she was saying. Eileen was generally at ease with her audiences, only rarely giving way to self-consciousness or contrivance. Her writings were often marked by non-conventional

combinations and comparisons, which accounted for much of the humor in them. She kept details precise in order to re-create scenes, and she also used careful detail to evoke moods as well. The occasions when she fell into generalizations and cliches were few, and the most obvious example of that happened when she was absorbed in experimenting with syntax and rhythm. During this experimentation, she momentarily lost some of the clarity of focus which characterized her writing in most other instances. On the other hand, she gained facility in sentence variety as a result of her experimentation. Problems with mechanics and usage were minor.

In effect, Eileen's writing moved essentially in harmony with the principal directions of the course. In addition, she found occasion through her writing to explore correspondences and connections, to discover, perhaps, how important they were to her. She found occasion to experiment with her voice through rhythms and the choice of detail. She found occasion to learn to adapt to readers not familiar to her. Eileen's writings show her becoming more aware of the world she lived in, more aware of herself in that world, and more aware of herself writing in that world. For Eileen, the course worked well.

About the Eight Portfolios as a Whole

Within this entire group of portfolios, strong evidence emerged to show that each student used writing to accomplish the first two principal expectations of the course--as a means of invention and discovery, and as a means of establishing dialogue through personal voice and adaptation to audience. Additionally, two of the remaining expectations--clear focus, and attention to detail and elaboration--were also frequently realized, and were closely tied to the writer's ability or inability at a given moment to adapt the material well for the audience. The portfolios showed less consistency in the matter of the fifth goal for the students' writing--that the conventions of the written language be attended to and care be taken in minimizing surface errors. Two of the students had few problems with the conventions to begin with. Two others had many problems, and seemed to make little headway in bringing these under control. The remaining four students also had problems, but by the end of the course were writing pieces that more nearly conformed to the conventions of edited American English than they had at the beginning.

Beyond realizing to various degrees the goals of the course, the portfolios of writing also verified that students over the span of the semester established distinguishing characteristics and purposes of their own in their writing. The "signature" of one student included her tendency to supply background information in everything she wrote, sometimes far more background than any reader could possibly need or want, as if to ensure that people would understand what she

had to say. For another student it included the tendency to immediately turn what had been provocative and energetic journal writings into innocuous, sanitized prose if she thought it was to be read by anyone but the teacher, a student who had severe mechanical problems and wrote often about her fears. And for yet another student it included a tendency to become self-absorbed and caught up in webs of words almost completely inaccessible to an outside reader, a student who at the end of the course wrote several times about a fascination with self-reliance. For each student in the study such distinguishing pre-occupations emerged. The course gave them occasion to express and in some cases work on their own individual concerns.

IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of a case study is to come to an understanding of the case. Because of that, the particular observations of such a study do not pretend to be generalizable to other cases--in this instance, to other students and other courses. However, such inquiries do suggest what Guba (1978) has called "working hypotheses," hypotheses which are highly tentative but which can inform and suggest questions for further research. The observations from the portion of the study reported here suggest a number of such hypotheses and such questions.

The first hypothesis concerns the design of writing courses. In this case, when the writing course was investigated on its own terms--that is, using the implicit goals of the instructional materials as a guide--the various elements of the course showed themselves to be essentially "in harmony" with one another, with the students realizing in their writing the goals implicit in assignments and instructor's responses. One hypothesis to be drawn from this is that the goals and expectations of a course are likely to be achieved if the assignments reinforce one another, and if the responses reinforce the assignments. It would be valuable to test this hypothesis by investigating other courses like this one in which the instructional materials were consonant with one another and reinforcing, and by investigating courses in which the design--intentially or not--consisted of contradictory elements. What would be the effect of a course, for example, in which the assignments and responses gave contradictory messages? If the assignments encouraged exploration and the use of a personal voice for example, but the responses consisted only of grades (which imply the final word, and do not in themselves encourage further exploration at all; which also project anything but a personal voice themselves), what message would have the louder voice? What message would get through? Or would the messages cancel each other out in some way? Or, to cite another example, what would be the effect of a course in which the implicit goals of the text book were different from those of the instructor who chose to use it? What would be the effect of two conflicting instructional voices? Would the effects of any of these "self-contradictory" courses ever be positive ones? Studies

of courses such as these would have significance for all writing teachers, and for other educators involved in curriculum design.

The second hypothesis concerns the reading and evaluation of student writing. The model for reading suggested in this study views the writing always from within the context in which it was created, and brings to each reading a sense of other writings, assignments, and responses. One of the principal benefits derived from the textures and multiple reference points in this study was the increased opportunity to refine and validate--or refute--initial and emerging observations. One hypothesis to be derived from this is that the more reliable judgments--and by extension the most helpful responses--occur when a large number of writings from a given student are read and analyzed together, rather than being read only individually as each is turned in over the course of a semester. It would be useful to test this by seeing if readers did indeed respond differently to a piece of student writing if they were, at one time, asked to analyze it and respond to it in isolation and, at another time, asked to read it together with others by that student. Would the judgment of the reader vary in each case? Would the imagined evaluation and response to the student be different? Such an investigation would have implications not only for the way in which teachers might choose to respond to students' writing throughout a course (i.e., response to individual pieces and/or response to several together, for what they might collectively tell), but also on the way in which they choose to evaluate the students' work for the course (i.e., whether to bring together a record of individual readings--as in averaging grades which had been assigned for each piece--or whether to re-read the entire portfolios of writings, or whether to somehow combine various approaches).

The third hypothesis concerns the study and evaluation of writing courses. This study proceeded under the assumption that the richer the context for studying a student's writing (or for studying a course), the richer and more reliable the understanding will be of that writing (or of that course). The hypothesis derived by extension from this is that an even more reliable study would involve contexts beyond the ones provided by the course materials alone. In this study, for example, it would have been valuable to have had some points of reference for determining the students' flexibilities across a range of purposes, both those purposes addressed within the course directly and those which the course may have indirectly served to encourage. Because most of the assignments within this course invited expressive and exploratory writing, most of the resulting observations and understandings about a student's development were of necessity centered on <u>those</u> areas within the universe of discourse. Yet it may have been the case, and indeed probably was the case, that in developing facility with expressive and exploratory prose the students may have been simultaneously developing abilities which would serve them when writing for other purposes. Access to that kind of information

would have required the introduction of extra-course materials, such as pre- and post-course writing tasks. Such writings are frequently used in evaluation of writing courses, of course, and they usually consist of a total of two writings from each students--one written at the beginning of the term, the other at the end of it. Often these are used as the exclusive basis for evaluation of a course's effectiveness and are not considered in the context of actual course writings, nor in the context of the other components of the course. While such de-contextualization provides a reading of something, it cannot provide a reading of a course. Removed from the texture of course relationships it is almost as thin as a couple of course writings by themselves would be. However, if students were asked to respond to a set of writing tasks--an expressive one, a referential one, and a persuasive one, for example--both before the course began and then again once the course was over, and if those writings were then considered in connection with the network of relationships within the course proper, they could provide many additional points of reference, and fruitful relationships within a case study. Had such material been obtained from students in this study, it could have been used both to confirm and extend the observations and understandings about the course. Given the orientation of the materials of the course proper, and the discoveries made on the basis of course materials, the investigation might have proceeded under the assumption that facility with expressive tasks would have increased the most, with persuasive tasks the least, and with referential tasks somewhere in between. It is impossible to know whether that pattern of abilities would have emerged for each student, and indeed such extra-course writings may have contained surprises. But whatever patterns <u>did</u> develop would have contributed to the understanding of the course and its possible influences. Such, hypothetically, would be the case with any course.

The study reported here was in its most encompassing scheme the case study of a course. Yet of necessity it was also the case study of eight student writers, each of whom created quite different constructions within the world of this course. As a case study, this investigation suggested the <u>living</u> quality of the course, and the students' writing. Conceiving of courses and writing in this way serves as a reminder of the complexity and vitality of each. Honoring that complexity and vitality requires caution in making conclusive statements, and requires receptivity to re-formulations and re-interpretations. Always more contexts can be considered. Always more connections can be pursued. The possibilities are inexhaustible. Such studies, therefore, invite more of their kind, to the ends of increased understanding of writing courses and what students make of them.

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